

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17493

BOMBAY 3040 FOLLOWS. SENT TO NEW DELHI FOR ACTION ON 2 DEC 76.
BEING RPTD FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOMBAY 3040

E.O.11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: RAJNI PATEL ON INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

1. THE THREE PRINCIPAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN BOMBAY (TIMES, EXPRESS, AND FREE PRESS JOURNAL) GAVE PROMINENT COVERAGE TO RAJNI PATEL TALK AT THE INDO-AMERICAN SOCIETY ON EVENING OF DECEMBER 1ST ON SUBJECT OF INDO-U.S. RELATIONS. THE THREE NEWSPAPERS CORRECTLY REPORTED THAT BASIC THRUST OF PATEL'S 30-MINUTE TALK WAS FRIENDLY TO THE U.S. HE SAW NO BASIC CONFLICT BETWEEN INDIA AND THE U.S. AND VIEWS CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES AS PROPITIOUS FOR STRENGTHENING TIES OF FRIENDSHIP. HE BELIEVES THAT ISSUES THAT DIVIDED INDIA AND U.S. IN THE PAST HAVE, FOR THE MOST PART, RECEDED DEEP INTO BACKGROUND. HE ADMITTED THAT DIEGO GARCIA AND BOMBERS FOR PAKISTAN REMAIN CONTENTIOUS BUT URGED THAT THESE AND OTHER ISSUES ON WHICH THE U.S. AND INDIA MIGHT NOT SEE EYE TO EYE BE TREATED WITH RESTRAINT SO THAT ATTENTION CAN BE FOCUSED ON AREAS WHERE COOPERATION ON MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST CAN BE ADVANCED.

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2. PATEL, A FORMER COMMUNIST AND CONTINUING LEFTIST, WHO

IS CURRENTLY PRESIDENT OF BOTH BOMBAY PRADESH CONGRESS COMMITTEE AND OF INDO-SOVIET FREINDSHIP SOCIETY, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HIS APPEARANCE BEFORE THE INDO-AMERICAN SOCIETY WOULD CAUSE "MANY EYEBROWS TO BE RAISED." BUT HE BELIVES IT IS ALTHOGETHER IN TUNE WITH CHANGING INTERNATIONAL CONDITIONS. HE SAID, HALF JOKINGLY, IF DETENTE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND RUSSIA AND CHINA SEES NIXON GOING TO PEKING WITH FULL FANFARE AND FORD VENTURING TO THE SOVIET UNION TO SHAKE HANDS WITH BREZNEV, IT IS CERTAINLY RIGHT FOR RAJNI PATEL TO HOLD OUT A HAND OF FRIENDSHIP TO THE U.S. FOR WHOSE PEOPLE HE HAS ALWAYS HAD THE WARMEST OF FEELINGS, DATING BACK TO HIS STUDENT'S DAYS, WHEN HE SPENT A YEAR TOURING AMERICA IN 39/40.

3. COMMENT: PATEL WAS AT HIS MOST SKILLFUL AND CHARMING SELF, AND THIS IS SAYING A LOT AS IN CONSUL GENERAL'S VIEW HE IS BY FAR THE MOST TALENTED POLITICIAN IN WEST INDIA. HE CLEARLY WANTED HIS APPEARANCE TO BE A SIGNFICANT OCCASION, ONE THAT WOULD BE FREE FROM PARTISAN SNIPING AND MINOR DISTURBANCES. AT HIS INITIATIVE, THE DEAN OF THE CONSULAR CORPS AND BRITISH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER JOINED US ON THE ROSTRUM. AS ALWAYS, PATEL WAS FREINDLY, COURTEOUS, AND CONSIDERATE OF ME, POSING NO QUESTIONS THAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO HANDLE. THERE HAS BEEN MUCH SPECULATION IN BOMBAY AS TO WHY PATEL CHOSE THE INDO-AMERICAN SOCIETY PLATFORM FOR SUCH A CONCILIATORY STAEMENT. INDRA MALHOTRA, THE TIMES ASSISTANT EDITOR FOR POLITICS, JOKINGLY CONGRATULATED ME ON THE CONVERSION OF RAJNI PATEL. I CONFESSED TO HIM THAT I WAS EQUALLY AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN PATEL'S TURN-ABOUT, EVEN THOUGH PATEL HAS ALWAYS BEEN PERSONALLY VERY FRIENDLY IN PRIVATE. IN THE INSUING DISCUSSIONS WITH MALHOTRA, TWO POINTS EMERGED AS LIKELY TO BE CLOEST TO THE CORE EXPLANATION OF PATEL'S SPEECH. FIRST, HE IS NEARLY DESPERATE FOR PROMINENT AND FAVORABLE PRESS COVERAGE, BUT PROBABLY MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE WANTED TO DEMONSTRATE PUBLICLY TO THE CENTER THAT HE IS NOT AN ALTOGETHER UNRECONSTRUCTED LEFTIST INCAPABLE OF SUPPORTING THE CURRENT DELHI FOREIGN
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POLICY LINE.

4. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH ME PATEL REMARKED THAT HIS BASIC CURRENT PROBLEMS ARE WITH SANJAY AND NOT WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. HE SAID SANJAY REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE THAT SOME OF HIS ACTIONS WITH WHICH SANJAY DISAGREES (APPARENTLY COLLECTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS) WERE CARRED OUT ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MRS. GANDHI. PATEL HOPED TO HAVE THIS PROBLEM STRAIGHTENED OUT SOON.

5. THIS GATHERING WAS ARRANGED AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE NEW LEADERSHIP OF THE INDO-AMERICAN SOCIETY WITHOUT ANY ADVANCE CONSULTATION WITH THE CONSULATE GENERAL OR USIS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME EVER, AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, THAT A POLITICAN WAS INVITED TO GIVE AN ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL TALK IN THE INDO-AMERICAN SOCIETY FORUM. MANY MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY HAVE PROTESTED AGAINST THIS TYPE OF VENTURE, POINTING OUT THAT IT VIOLATES A LONG-HELD PRECEPT AND IS DANGEROUS TO THE INTEGRITY OF THE ORGANIZATION. CONYNGHAM AND I SHARE THIS VIEW AND WILL MAKE CLEAR TO THE SOCIETY THAT WE WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO CONTINUE A CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE SOCIETY IF IT CONTINUES TO VENTURE INTO THE POLITICAL AREA. WHILE THIS EVENT TURNED OUT WELL FROM OUR STANDPOINT, THE RISK INHERENT IN SUCH UNCONTROLLED ACTIVITIES FAR OUTWEIGHS ANY POSSIBLE BENEFITS. INITIAL SOUNDINGS INDICATE THAT THE SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WILL LAY DOWN A PROSCRIPTION AGAINST FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THIS TYPE.

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